

ECOHEALTH TRAINING AWARDS - 2002 THEME

“Building the Concepts and Tools for Assessing Human Health Status Outcomes within an Ecosystem Approach to Human Health”

By

Dr. Roberto Bazzani (on behalf of the Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health Program Initiative, IDRC). rbazzani@idrc.ca

Rationale

During previous editions of the Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health Training Award, a majority of applicants have come from an ENRM disciplinary background. Since the ultimate goal of our approach is to enhance human health, it was suggested that it might be important to reach and involve a larger proportion of researchers from the human health sector. This year's awardees training week will therefore attempt to strengthen the human health component of the Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health Training Awards, and focus on the multiple dimensions of the human health and well-being continuum. Specific attention will be given to human health methodologies and indicators and specific markers of these dimensions.

This year's theme is grounded in the notion that the Awards Program is an appropriate place to enhance the human health aspects of the Ecosystem Approaches to Human Health program. It would represent an opportunity to draw in more population health / public health professionals and academics into the paradigm. By engaging with determinants of health and the assessment of community health status, the program opens space for including new developments in public health in its framework.

The human health dimension in the context of the Ecohealth approach

The Ecohealth approach brings a systemic perspective of social and ecological determinants of human health. Two differences with the population health or public health approach illustrate the innovative ways in which the human health dimension is conceived within the Ecohealth perspective:

A) The population health or public health approach look at a multiple set of determinants and respond to them through the delivery of health promotion and preventive policies and programs. However, they lack of an interactive and systemic perspective. The Ecohealth approach looks at the health of people in the context of an ecosystem and develops a holistic understanding of the relationships between the health of the ecosystem and human health. Consequently, in order to improve human health, the Ecohealth approach response to health determinants is implemented through a better management of the ecosystem and community empowerment.

B) Even if the public health approach recognizes the need for intersectorial coordination to address health determinants, in most cases the responses to health determinants are centred almost

exclusively through the health system and services delivery. Quite the opposite, the Ecohealth response promotes a participatory management of the ecosystem, involving the diverse set of concerned stakeholders.

Focus of the Award Call

The proposed focus of the current Award Call is to support studies that will develop concepts and tools for assessing human health status outcomes within an *Ecosystem Approach to Human Health*. The conceptualization of human health status goes far beyond the biophysical dimensions of health at the individual level, and recognizes that community health depends on the well functioning of ecosystems and socio-political and economic systems. The assessment of health outcomes, implies the need to build specific and measurable indicators that will reflect on the impacts upon human health that are determined by the functioning of natural and social dimensions of ecosystems. The focus of this Award Call deals with the use of appropriate concepts and tools enabling to assess and measure the impact upon human health.

Background

Further discussions could take into consideration the following concepts. First, it would be useful to bring into the picture the classical health research scheme classification:

LEVEL	DETERMINANTS	RESPONSES to determinants	GOAL
INDIVIDUAL	Bio-Medical	Clinical	patients with -disease + health
COMMUNITY	Epidemiological & other disciplines	Through health systems & services	community health

Obviously, it is an over simplification. New paradigms in Public health have gone further beyond using traditional epidemiology, embracing social and environmental sciences to assess better human health determinants. It is indeed a current practice among public health researchers to use qualitative tools in addition to the classical epidemiological designs.

The key challenge for Ecohealth would be to move public health academics into an Ecohealth approach, which implies:

- the analysis of interactions between multiple determinants within a defined ECOSYSTEM
- the use of transdisciplinary, participatory and gender integrative methodological strategies
- to move from an exclusive health service response to an ecosystem management perspective that will imply intersectorial programs and policies

So,

LEVEL	DETERMINANTS	RESPONSES to determinants	GOAL
ECOSYSTEM	environmental, social, cultural, biological	Ecosystem management and community empowerment	healthier communities in healthier ecosystems

Contents

The award program for 2002 will focus on the human health dimension of the Ecohealth approach. Some key aspects to take into account would be to differentiate between:

a) working at the determinants of health or health outcomes level, or how to link both levels; b) working at the individual or community health level; c) using broad well-being definitions of health status or developing strategies for measurable health status specific outcomes.

Health determinants

The evolution of Public Health Thinking in Canada in the past thirty years (Forget, Lebel, 2001) has been remarkable. It recognizes the multiple and interrelated nature of health determinants (social and economic environments, physical environment, personal lifestyle, personal capacities and skills, health services) and highlights the key role of health promotion policies. Canada is world wide recognized as a leader in this field. This goes obviously far beyond biomedical determinants which are the centre of clinical research.

In countries of the South, many thinkers have also developed innovative approaches to public health as the social epidemiology movement in LAC, developing a strong critical posture to the predominant clinical and curative models dominant in most health systems in LAC (Breilh, 1994).

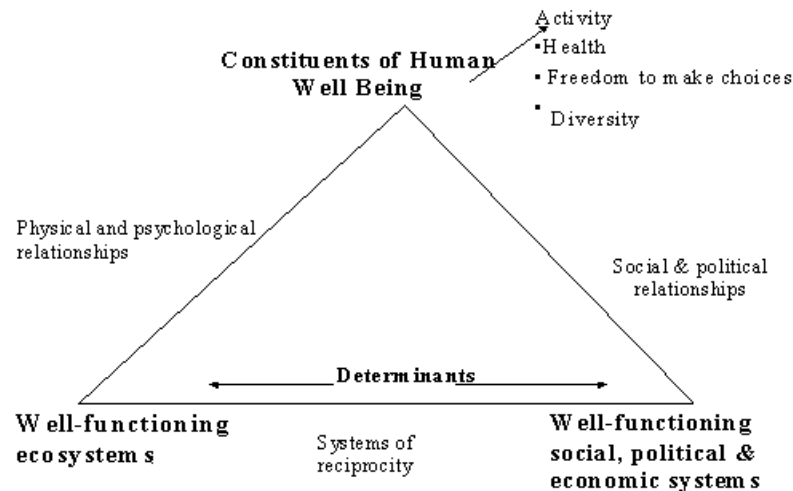
In 1996, an IDRC sponsored project gathered a group of public health experts who discussed the most relevant research issues for the next years in LAC (Sánchez, Bazzani, Gómez, 1998). They identified a series of main macro-trends, that embrace those multiple health determinants: the increasing challenge of social disruption and poverty dilemmas, the epidemiological and demographic transition, changes in lifestyles and modernization patterns (both at the individual and community level), the expanding menaces of environmental stressors and the need to develop new health systems responses.

A holistic ecosystem approach should face health determinants by analyzing the web of interactions between the well-functioning of ecosystems and the well-functioning of social, political and economic systems. As stated by Dr. Noronha (Noronha, 2002), the set of physical-

psychological and socio-political relationships will determine the Constituents of the Human Well Being.

Constituents and Determinants of Well Being (Noronha 2002)¹

As part of an Ecohealth supported project, (Noronha 2002) proposed a conceptual framework for the development of tools to track health and well being in a mining region. The chapter devoted to the "Understanding human well-being" is of special interest to this discussion. Dr Noronha's framework refers to the Constituents and Determinants of Well Being. Within her definition of the Constituents of Well Being, concepts go beyond the classical WHO definition of human health (state of physical, mental and social well-being)



Aron, Ellis, and Hobbs (2001) have recently published a new framework promoting an integrated assessment of ecosystem change and public health, which emphasizes the degradation of natural resources, population growth and economic development as three key factors related to public health.

The human health status outcomes

Whether using Noronha's definition, or the set of indicators developed by WHO-Quality of Life, it is still necessary to clarify whether we are referring to the individual or community level. We could strongly argue that if we are referring to the well-being of ecosystems and socio-economic systems (embracing cultural & political), as determinants, we should then refer to community well being. However, when developing an ecosystem approach to human health study, the

¹ Dr. Noronha is the principal investigator for an IDRC-funded Ecohealth Project "Environmental and Social Performance Indicators and Sustainability Markers in Minerals Development: Indicators of Health and Well-Being"

research framework will consider and study different units or levels - individual, family, community, region, remote communities, and global (IDRC, UNEP, 2001).

While ecohealth projects frequently require sufficient time for enabling changes on the human health status, either at the level of individuals or communities, the training awards offer the opportunity for developing short term studies contributing to the analysis of specific conceptual and methodological issues. By focusing on the human health and well-being continuum, the Ecohealth Training Awards - 2002 Theme will contribute to the discussion on conceptual frameworks, strategies and tools to measure human health status outcomes, within the context of the Ecosystem Approach to Human Health paradigm.

References

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